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Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching

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CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND TEACHING

BY PATRICIA FANNING

I love coming to work every day," says Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching (CART) co-coordinator Dr. Nancy Lynch Street, Department of Communications and Theatre Arts. Her co-coordinator, Dr. Charles Robinson, Department of Secondary Education and Professional Programs, agrees. "CART is a wonderful place; a place where we have the freedom to think outside the box, to generate ideas and see where they might lead." And, in recent years, these ideas have led to quite a few exciting places.

First, there is the Faculty and Librarian Research Grant (FLRG), a program initiated in December, 1999, and funded by the Bridgewater State College Foundation. The grants are formally awarded by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, but CART is involved, via its peer committee, in processing, reviewing, evaluating, and recommending the recipients to the Provost's Office. The awards have gone to such diverse projects as: an explanation of registration and voting under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) under study by Dr. David Hill, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Canadian Studies; an expedition to Africa to collect data from the June, 2001 total solar eclipse by Dr. Martina Belz Arndt of the Department of Physics; and an examination of gay/straight community building in Provincetown, Massachusetts by Dr. Sandra Faiman-Silva in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

All the grants administered through CART – small grants, summer grants, travel grants, and the FLRG – allow faculty the opportunity and funding to pursue research that may be used in the classroom as well as in publications. Dr. David Hill's survey research on the attitudes of voters newly registered under the NVRA will definitely have an impact on his classes. "I try to make sure that my research will be relevant to

my coursework," Hill explains. "I teach a course in political participation and another in research methods. This study will bring significant material to both." In addition, several students will assist Hill in conducting the survey of over 1,000 Massachusetts voters. "I'm delighted to have received the funding which will allow me to work with students on this project," says Hill. Similarly enthusiastic about her work, Dr. Martina Arndt is pleased to be heading to Africa in June to join a research team engaged in observing a total solar eclipse. They will measure the magnetic field structure of the upper solar atmosphere, as well as plasma density and speed. These observations can only be made during the three minute eclipse. "This is an enormous opportunity for me," says Arndt. "As a first year faculty member, the FLRG and CART small grant will allow me to establish a research program and include undergraduates in this project." Arndt's FLRG includes a summer stipend for a student to assist her in analyzing the data once she has returned to campus.

CART directly assists faculty/librarian research in another way as well – through the purchase of necessary capital equipment. "The nice thing about these resources," says Street, "is that if we have the resources, faculty and librarians can borrow the equipment from CART and their grant money can be allocated to buy more time, travel, or other materials." There is always a demand for equipment resources and this year, thanks to support from the administration, the resources budget increased. "We really appreciate the collaboration and support of Larry Richards, Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Bill Davis, Chief Information Officer, Information Technology," comments Robinson. "With the additional funding, CART was able to purchase laptop computers, digital still cameras, and digital video cameras." This equipment will be utilized by many faculty/librarians in the coming months including Dr. Arndt on her trip to Africa and Dr. Jabbar Al-Obaidi, Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts, and Dr. Salil Sachdev of the Department of Music, who will travel on an FLRG funded project to record and study the folk music of India. "The support these resources provide are crucial," says Robinson. "It enables our faculty and librarians to take state-of-the-art equipment into the field, something which allows them to complete their research goals."

But CART does not stop there. "CART's mission," explains Street, "is to enhance the teaching, research, and scholarly activities of BSC faculty, librarians, and administrators through institutional support and professional development." The grant programs provide much of the institutional financial support, and our resources enhance that effort, but professional development is an equally important component of CART. "We are always searching for new initiatives," says Robinson, "innovative ideas and forums that will excite faculty, librarians and administrators, will encourage dialog, and enhance our joint academic experience."



Dr. Charles Robinson and Dr. Nancy Street

This year the Center has developed several new programs and workshops in collaboration with various departments on campus. Using a consortium model, CART has brought the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts together to share research and expertise on classroom discussion, presentation, and communication strategies with the rest of the college community. CART also provided a forum for discussions about such interdisciplinary programs as the Asian Studies Program and the proposed Irish-American Studies Program. "We hope to do more of this type of collaboration in the future," comments Robinson. Another new program that has been an undeniable success has been the CART sponsored book talk. "We feel this is an initiative that holds a lot of promise," Robinson asserts. This spring, a group of faculty and librarians met to discuss *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer. "The book was stimulating and the discussion was lively," reports Robinson, and the coordinators hope that administration will support future Book Talks as a venue for faculty and librarians to come together to discuss topics of mutual concern.

The Center also intends to foster professional development by offering workshops on grant preparation, by participating in the orientation of new faculty, and, in conjunction with MSCA, providing faculty with guidelines for the development of their reappointment, promotion, and tenure portfolios. "We are exceedingly pleased with the participation in CART that some of our new initiatives have garnered," says Street, "and we believe that participation will continue to increase as word spreads. We aim to become a significant aspect of life on this campus." For example, the coordinators' hope that CART and its grants and programs can assist in the attraction and retention of junior faculty is apparently coming to fruition. A growing number of grant applications are submitted by junior faculty who see CART support as a means to initiate significant research projects and advance their career goals.

This is not to say that CART caters only to new faculty and librarians. Those like Dr. Sandra Faiman-Silva, a faculty member for more than ten years, and a past recipient of the Dr. Jordan D. Fiore Prize for World Justice, also find CART a welcome option and supportive environment. "Research is very important to me, to nourish me intellectually, allow me to pursue areas of research I am passionate about, and to help me develop new areas of theory and substance in my courses," Dr. Faiman-Silva explains. "CART grants are very important because external grants are often very cumbersome and don't allow for small amounts of money to keep a project going." In addition to subsidizing travel expenses, materials, and support assistance, many CART grants also allow faculty to buy a course release to continue their research. Faiman-Silva finds this option crucial. "It gives us time to get our research completed. I can't stress that enough."

And that's just the way Street and Robinson like it. "We're here to provide research and development support in any way we can," asserts Street. "At CART we're not restricted by disciplines or departments. We have the freedom to explore new avenues and options for meeting and for realizing our mission." Robinson nods in agreement. "We're here to help. We're open to new challenges and we encourage faculty and librarians to stop by and talk about their ideas."